

An Eye on the CIA

The Central Intelligence Agency, President Kennedy commented in a televised interview Monday evening, "coordinates its efforts with the State Department and the Defense Department." He was speaking of the CIA's role in Viet Nam about which he declined to go into detail.

The principle involved is so obviously proper that one might wonder why Mr. Kennedy even bothered to enunciate it. But the truth is that the CIA's coordination with other branches of the government is not always as apparent as his words suggest.

Two weeks ago, Sen. Wayne Morse, D-Ore., told the Senate it was difficult to speak on the floor of the chamber "on what the CIA policy really was, because senators cannot find out." He went on:

"As a member of the Foreign Relations Committee I cannot tell the Senate—nor can any other member of the committee—what the facts are about the CIA policy in South Viet Nam or anywhere else in the world. . . .

"Congress has permitted CIA to continue to exercise what appears, in fact, to amount to a police power in a democracy. . . . There is no justification for giving any agency of government—CIA or any other—unchecked power."

The complaint is not new. Long before the U2 flights over Russia ended in the capture of Pilot Francis G. Powers, or the ill-planned invasion of Cuba came to its inglorious denouement, voices have been raised in dismay over the super-secrecy surrounding the agency's operations. As early as 1956, Sen. Mike Mansfield, D-Mont., was demanding that a joint committee be established

to make continuing studies of the CIA. Congress has been strangely reluctant to act.

The CIA Act of 1949 specifically exempts the agency from the provisions of any law requiring publication or disclosure of the "organization, functions, names, official titles, salaries or numbers of personnel employees." While this kind of freedom from public scrutiny gives the CIA both its strengths and its occasionally observable weaknesses, it should not inhibit the congressional right of supervision.

Admittedly, any disclosure of some of the CIA's cloak-and-dagger activities could be a damaging blow to the nation's best interests. But there are congressional committees on other aspects of foreign affairs, defense matters and atomic energy which possess knowledge on undertakings just as secret as CIA projects. Is there any reason why there should not be a joint committee, patterned after the one which has dealt with atomic energy matters for so long, and given authority to keep close watch on the CIA?

The nation would have to trust its members to guard with their very lives the secrets they were given. Now, that same sort of trust is reposed in the appointed heads of the vast intelligence apparatus. It is up to the responsible legislators elected by the people.